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ABSTRACT

Fifty instructors, from nine school districts and five 4-year institutions, are taking part in the SET program--Students Evaluate Teaching. Research shows that (1) students can and do make fairly sound ratings of their teachers; (2) they tend to agree with each other; (3) teachers rated best by students tend to obtain highest student gains; (4) student ratings often differ from those by principals, supervisors, and other teachers. SET is an effective way for students to express their opinions, valid or otherwise. A visiting instructor is requested by any educator who feels the session can help him improve his teaching. The visitor leads a student discussion, during which he elicits their comments. The requesting teacher prepares his class for the visit, urging candid comment. Both teachers assure the students that their anonymous remarks will be used only for improving course content and teaching methods. (This report includes a copy of the visitor's discussion agenda.) Transcripts of the session, a conference between the two instructors, and a class discussion after the visit make up the evaluation. The experiment's immediate objectives are to give a chance for the teacher to improve his instructions and the student to express himself on the programs. It is a way to define a group's concept of what makes one member of an occupation more effective than another. The SET evaluations will be raw data for application of the Critical Incident Technique. Future plans for the program are discussed. (HH)

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SET

Students Evaluate Teaching

There is good reason to believe that student unrest, especially at the college level, has been partly a result of what young people feel is poor instruction. Students are no longer satisfied with a voice at a lectern hiding behind a list of impressive degrees. They want involvement with their teachers; they need to be able to communicate more with the establishment. Students are more anxious and less tolerant of unexplained delays, unnecessary red tape and poor teaching. The tenuousness of today's living brought on by the advent of nuclear weapons and the Vietnam war, has created a new breed of students who want to ask questions, get honest answers and test their own ideas and opinions.

With the belief that student opinion is of vital importance and that students can help in the improvement of instruction, a program, SET (Students Evaluate Teaching), has been developed in which students are called upon to evaluate the instruction they are receiving. Representatives from nine school districts and five colleges and universities involving 50 instructors are already participating in the program. There is evidence that student ratings are accurate and important. A patient evaluates his physician; a client evaluates his attorney; a reader evaluates an author; but a teacher is evaluated by his superior, whereas, he should be evaluated by his students. SET proposed to elicit this evaluation from students in a dignified and meaningful way.

It is stated in a special project prepared for and published by the joint Committee on Personnel Procedures by the California School Boards Association that "There is a growing body of research literature on the use of student's rating of their teachers. This literature probably is more favorable and more consistent than any other in the area of teacher evaluation.

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Almost without exception the research reports indicate that pupils can and do make reasonably accurate ratings of teachers. Their ratings tend to agree with each other, and the teachers who are rated best by pupils tend to obtain the highest pupil gains. Pupil ratings often do not agree with ratings by principals, supervisors, and other teachers."[1]

William A. McCall[2] in an article on Measurement of Teacher Merit further states that "At last we find some professionally competent judges to teaching skill, namely, the teacher's pupils, especially after they have been taught by the teacher for nearly a year. Out of the mouths of children come more accurate judgments of teachers than that rendered by their peers and superiors..."

The fact that evidence proves that students are often accurate in what they say is a great step toward encouraging recognition of the importance of student opinion; however, whether students are accurate or not, what they think is still important. For example, the fact that a third grader thinks his classroom is messy or that a graduate student thinks his professor shows favoritism, may not be relevant because learning may thrive in an untidy room, and a seminar may be more productive to all members if a few members and the professor are carrying on a stimulating dialogue. However, the significant point is that the students believe that these things are valid; therefore, it is important for the instructor to understand what the students have to say. SET gives students the opportunity for dignified and effective expression and involvement. It is a legitimate participation by students in academic affairs.

(1) Howsam, R. B. "Who's A Good Teacher?" Joint Committee on Personnel Proceudres - page 33, 1960

(2) McCall, W. A. "Measurement of Teacher Merit", Raliegh, North Carolina: State Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1952

This experimental program attempts to improve instruction at all levels through a system which would provide an alternative to the old method of sitting in by an administrator. This latter method creates an artificial situation - one which does not yield an accurate picture of day-to-day classroom teaching. When the administrator enters the classroom, the instructor either puts on a "good show" or freezes which gives an unusually poor impression. If the instructor asks the students to write or type anonymously an evaluation of the class and his teaching, the student is inhibited by the knowledge that the instructor will probably recognize his handwriting, typing or vocabulary. An evaluation based on a check-off blank used by itself is far too limited in its scope.

The technique of the program, SET, involves gathering information through an instructor-student discussion period in which a visiting instructor, in the absence of the resident instructor, elicits comments from students on many aspects of the course. The plan is based on the fundamental concept that most students when properly stimulated, will comment fairly and surprisingly accurately if they are convinced that the instructor is genuinely interested in their opinions. These opinions can be a valuable source of information for self-evaluation by the instructor.

The visits are requested by educators at the primary, secondary, college and university levels who feel that the sessions can help them improve their teaching. The visiting instructor is chosen from another district or college. He is someone who is unknown to the students as they are to him, and no introductions are made. Thus it is hoped that an impersonal relationship can be maintained.

The resident instructor used the following proc dure in preparing his class for the evaluation session, which he reads aloud to the class before the next session of the class at which the visiting instructor appears.

1. I have arranged for this class to participate in a SET program. A visiting instructor who should be unknown to you will come to the next session of this class. He will lead you in a discussion evaluation of this class and cover such subjects as the content, outline, scope, teaching methods, text, and the instructor. I sincerely request that for my benefit so that I can imporve my instruction you discuss these areas openly, candidly, honestly, and constructively. Don't feel that you need to (1) protect me in the discussion, (2) flatter me, or (3) tear me down completely.
2. Remember--there will be <u>no</u> identification of anybody of anything said during this evaluation session; so again, I urgently request you to speak out freely at the next session of this class when you will be evaluating this learning situation.

When the visiting instructor meets with the class, he reads aloud to it the following statement:

1. I am here at the request and on the invitation of your instructor <u>(name)</u>. He is hopeful that during our discussion information will be revealed which will enable him to become a better instructor both through his own presentation and his organization of the course. We have with us today a secretary, who is unknown to you, who will take shorthand. It is important for you to understand that the transcription of your discussion will go <u>only</u> to the resident instructor. Furthermore, and equally important, there will be no identification of who makes which comment during today's discussion.
2. While presiding over our evaluation discussion today, I will follow an agenda that was designed to elicit germane information related to this course. In general, we will stay with the agenda, but

there will be room for ideas that are of concern and may be outside the agenda.

With this brief explanation to the class, the visiting instructor uses the following agenda and proceeds with the evaluation.

Discussion Agenda

I. Understandings which students have about the nature of the course

1. What are the objectives in this course?
2. What is it you're supposed to know or be able to do as a result of having taken the course?
3. Do the laboratory work and the on-campus work fit together? How?
4. Who takes this course? (Juniors, seniors, graduates?)
5. Is the course part of a sequence? Where does it fit in the sequence?
6. What is the relation of the course to other teacher preparation courses?
7. If there is confusion about the purpose of the course, is it because students may be taking the course out of the intended sequence?

II. Purpose, Role, and use of the learning materials

1. What texts are used?
2. How are they used?
3. Do they fit the purposes of the course?
4. What kinds of learning materials should be used? Why?

III. The teacher and his methods

1. Does he know his subject? Is he expert?
2. Does he come to class prepared?
3. What teaching methods does he use? Are they appropriate to his purposes?
4. How does he feel about his students?

5. Is he available to students both in class and out of class?

6. If you seek him out, what do you seek him for?

(Here the intent is to find out whether they ask only about "safe things," or about assignments, or for personal guidance, or for enjoyment of him as someone to chat with.)

7. How do you decide what to write about?

8. Are the topics relevant to what the class is about?

9. Does the teacher critique your papers?

10. Are his comments helpful?

11. How are the papers graded?

12. What else in the work is graded?

13. On what basis are gardes given?

14. How is your final grade determined?

15. Is the basis for the grade valid? Fair?

16. What do you think ought to be garded? How?

17. Is the weighting given to different kinds of work adequate? Fair?

18. Is there a better way to do it?

19. What is the teacher's general attitude toward students?

20. Does the teaching have continuity?

21. Does the teacher follow up or follow through ideas?

22. Is the teacher enthusiastic about the teaching? The class?

23. Does he have favorites?

24. Do you think he'd like to do some things differently if he felt he could?

25. Does the teacher stimulate you to do creative thinking?

General Assessment

If you were to give grades, what grade would give the following:

The teacher?
The course?
The texts?

Transcripts of the sessions (which carry no names) are made. These together with conferences between the two instructors, and a discussion with the class after the meeting by the resident instructor, make up the total evaluation.

Nowhere in literature relative to instruction and the improvement and evaluation thereof has the SET technique been employed and except for the works of Flanagan[1] and Jensen[2], nothing in the literature in the opinion of the author relates to this area, and it relates only as techniques for handling the findings of the experiment.

As is stated above, there are two main immediate objectives in this experiment: (1) the opportunity for a teacher to improve his own instruction, and (2) the opportunity for students to express themselves regarding the kinds of instructional programs they are receiving. There are, however, long-term experimental possibilities that will hopefully get into the realm of evaluating objectively the instruction evaluations that have been procured in the manner described above. It is currently planned to use the Critical Incidence Technique for this objective evaluation, an invention of John C. Flanagan[1] who has used it in a number of situations. Travers[3] describes this technique as a method of "observation, but it also involves the judgment of the observer concerning what should be observed and recorded. The technique is a method of defining the group's concept of what makes a particular member of an occupation more effective than other members. It is a way of defining, for example, what superintendents mean

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(1) Flanagan, John C., Design for a Study of American Youth, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962.

(2) Jensen, Alfred "Determining Critical Requirements of Teachers," Journal of Experimental Education XX (1951-52), 79-85.

(3) Travers, Robert M. W., An Introduction to Educational Research, Second Edition, New York: The MacMillan Company, 1964.

when they say that teacher X is more effective than teacher Y." Travers[3] goes on to say that it helps to avoid difficult situations that are created by superintendents and principals when they ask the question, "What makes a good teacher?"; and answers to these kinds of questions are non-specific and vague and give rise to other questions such as whether the teacher is considerate and kind and provides effective incentives, etc. Not all teachers may be described in such nice terms, and we do not all conform to the same criteria; so it is not going to be possible to measure development on the basis of these generalizations. Hence, Flanagan's Critical Incidence Technique is supposed to be used to describe more adequately what a person has in mind when he says that one teacher is better than another. To refer to Travers again, ". . .this does not in any way mitigate the fact that the technique is still operating in the domain of judgments. In the ultimate analysis, the pronouncement by any person of what makes a good teacher must be based upon a reason judgment that this type of student learning is better than that."

In 1951 Jensen[2] used a Critical Incident Technique, and he described the critical incident as an observed teacher behavior or aspect of teacher behavior that is judged to make the difference between success and failure in teaching. The term "judged" indicates what is being accomplished, which is to be summarized in terms of behavior incidents. We must bear in mind that there is very little point in collecting descriptions of commonplace behavior that is about as typical of those teachers judged to be good as of those judged to be poor. We must note that this method is not a scientific device for deciding what constitutes good teaching. It is only a method

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(3) Travers, Robert M.W., An Introduction to Educational Research, Second Edition, New York: The MacMillan Company, 1964

(2) Jensen, Alfred, "Determining Critical Requirements of Teachers," Journal

for describing what some personal group considers to be crucial matters in judging the merits of teaching.

Jensen asked those cooperating in this study to first think of an ineffective teacher and then to relate an incident that made him say he was an ineffective teacher or made him think he was incompetent; and the same was done for effective teachers. Jensen also asked participants in his experiment to try to recall in their own childhood classroom incidents that were effective and ineffective on the part of their teachers.

The raw data used in the Critical Incident Technique will consist essentially of the transcripts resulting from the SET classroom evaluation. Gathering this data together and making some meaningfulness out of it, is obviously a tremendous task and will require considerable work and research. Travers and others interested in the Critical Incident Technique have recognized it to be an extremely laborious one. It involves masses of data and techniques that are time consuming.

In the coming months, a pool of visiting instructors will be trained as experts in eliciting responses in the classroom. It is hoped that the SET program will go on a four-year basis with a director and two assistants. The director and one assistant will have the task of channeling information about the program throughout the country, setting up evaluation situations and arranging for feedback of results. The second assistant will be involved with the accumulation and treatment of data.

The organization of an advisory council is in process. The following professors have already accepted positions on this council: Dr. Kenneth Bailey, University of California, Irvine; Dr. Dan Dawson, University of Southern California; Mr. Preston Hatchkiss, Manager, Rixby Ranch, Los Angeles; Dr. Hazel Jones, California State College, Fullerton; Dr. William Langsdorf, President, California State College, Fullerton; Dr. William Strand, Stanford

University; Mr. Leo Tamamian, Manager, Manufacturing, Hughes Aircraft, Fullerton; Dr. Proctor Thompson, Claremont Men's College; and Dr. Stanley Williams, California State College, Long Beach. A financial advisory committee headed by Mr. Harold Jackson, Vice President, Bank of America, will assist in acquiring and handling funds for the operation of the program.

More students are serious today about their education than any time before in our history. They will accept a subordinate role with their instructors only in their comparative levels of knowledge. Above all, students want to relate honestly with their institutions. SET helps to provide this relatedness.

It should be remembered that there are two keys to the success of SET:

1. Students have the opportunity to speak candidly about their educational program.
2. The students' remarks are the confidential private property of the instructor about whom they are made.

COMMENTS MADE BY INSTRUCTORS AND STUDENTS

WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE SET PROGRAM

Student Comments

1. Sixth grader - "Sometimes she isn't always here before us. We have to wait outside. Sometimes she's in a bad mood. We were in here before her once and someone had left a big cigar on her desk and she was in a bad mood and she got real mad."

2. Sixth grader - "She always says she will assign these essays, but no one has ever had one yet."

3. Third grader - "He goes from subject to subject and knows what he is going to do next."

4. Fifth grader - "Yes, she likes everyone even if they don't like her."

5. Sixth grader - "He takes his contact lenses out in front of the class - I squirm."

6. Graduate student - "How many professors would let you speak out the way we have in this class?"

7. College student - "It's a good program and it should be used for all classes. One day a semester set aside for this wouldn't hurt."

Instructors' Comments

1. College - "When I entered the class, which consisted of college seniors, and I told them why I was there, their first response was one of disbelief that anyone was interested in their opinions. After I convinced them that it was 'for real,' the discussion got underway in a most relaxing, refreshing, and revealing way."

2. Elementary - "I think the SET experience is very worthwhile. I not only gained from seeing the reports on my teaching, but, I found I was learning something about young people in general."

3. Secondary - "Certainly this evaluative technique should be furthered. It appears that it would be of great help to almost all teachers."

4. Elementary - "In evaluating the students' response, I feel sure there must be several areas where I might improve in terms of teaching effectiveness."

5. College - "To summarize my feelings concerning the SET experiment, I believe it was a beneficial and worthwhile experience."

6. Elementary - "I think this technique, this program, made me stop and think more than anything else."

7. University - "At the college level I find that students have some pretty good ideas of their own about the course material. It helps to point up the question of what should be taught. Career-oriented students have some pretty good ideas about an answer to this question in professional courses."

8. Elementary - "SET is a concept as simple as a safety pin; it makes you wonder why nobody thought of it before because it works simply and so beautifully. Also, it is very significant to me the importance placed on the individual self-improvement of the instructor."

9. Elementary - "They didn't like my personal habit of grabbing them by the neck when I wanted to solve a problem."

10. University - "As far as the college level is concerned, it doesn't take too much to convince the students that everything is off the record and won't be used against them or their professor."

11. College - "I feel the evaluation was a good joint effort between the students, faculty, and administration. All three are involved in this."

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SET Program

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